

Chasing the Dreams Away

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Not many knew the true Satsuki Kiryuin hidden inside the stiff leader of Honnoji. And only one knew of the darkness that plagued her dreams at night.

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Gazing out from her perch at the top of the world, the actress struck an imposing stance. "Actress..." Satsuki thought bitterly, as she watched her miniscule students wander aimlessly over the courtyard before class. She was an actress.

The world saw the Kiryuin name and in an instant she was transformed from a girl to a goddess. But she didn't feel like a goddess. She felt like a pawn, a piece of property that belonged to her mother. And in a way she was, carrying out her mother's plans for her. She was nothing more to her mother but a servant to COVERS, bringing life fibers to the entire student population of Japan.

A bitter smile graced Satsuki's lips as she reflected upon her acting resume. Imposing leader. Subservient daughter. Mentor. Goddess. But all these roles, not one of them reflected the real Satsuki Kiryuin hidden inside the stiff shell standing on top of Honnoji. Not one person knew that she longed to smile, laugh, or walk anonymously through the crowd. Not one person knew the pain and humiliation that she desperately wished to share, to weep over in the comforting presence of an equal. Not one person knew of the trauma inflicted to her at the hands of her mother, and her eternal disgust of the Kiryuin name.

Sure, there were some that Satsuki considered to be close. Nonon had been a companion since the beginning of her school conquest mission. Nonon had served to be a great friend over the years, fiercely loyal to Satsuki and even serving as her confidante in the early years. But predictably, the Kiryuin name had sullied their relationship. As Satsuki rose higher through the ranks, Nonon grew to be less of a friend and more of a subordinate, a sidekick to her plans. Very rarely did Nonon address her familiarly anymore, opting instead for a stiff "Satsuki-sama." And so, Satsuki's acting menagerie

had expanded to include military commander even in the presence of her best friend.

Soroi was perhaps the closest to knowing the true Satsuki. The butler had served her for years, and had become a father figure to her. To the outside eye he appeared as no more than a servant, appearing at the beck and call of Satsuki and feeding her tea addiction. But no outside eye had ever witnessed a return journey from her mother's mansion or the nightmares she had suffered as a child. Satsuki never discussed her mother's abuse with Soroi, nor did she have to. Soroi had inferred what her mother's true character was years ago.

It had been yet another quiet journey back from the Kiryuin mansion. Satsuki was at the time seven years old, and had spent the flight gazing out the window with a studiously blank expression. But Soroi could tell by the rigid position of her shoulders and creases around her eyes and something was bothering the child. His suspicions were raised further when Satsuki declined his offer of tea, claiming an upset stomach.

It had been rather late when they returned, so Soroi prepared her bed immediately upon their arrival back at the middle school dormitory. Satsuki had wordlessly changed into her favourite nightgown and climbed into bed. The expression on the young girl's face still bothered him, but Soroi dismissed it as being caused by exhaustion from the late travel. He excused himself for the night and settled in with a novel in his quarters. But the book had done nothing to ease his turbulent thoughts and when he finally climbed into bed he found himself restlessly tossing and turning.

Hours later Soroi had only just begun drifting off when he was jolted awake by a piercing scream from the next room over. He immediately sprang out of bed and hurried to his Mistress's side, fearing the worst. Young Satsuki appeared to be having a fit in her sleep, arms fending off an unknown assailant and sweat drenching her brow and bedding. He lingered at the foot of her bed for a

moment, unsure of whether it was his place to wake her from her obvious nightmare.

"My lady," he called gently to her, hoping his voice would be enough to rouse her without shocking her awake. "Lady Satsuki!" The girl only continued to struggle on the mattress, her expression one of complete terror and her breaths consisting of ragged gasps and moans. Soroi sat on the edge of the bed and gently laid a hand on her shoulder, rubbing lightly in a comforting motion. "Shh. It's only a dream, Lady Satsuki."

At his touch, the girl's breathing hitched and her limbs froze. She let out a distressed moan, then gulped a breath before uttering an unmistakeable "Mother!"

"It's only a dream, Lady Satsuki. Your mother is fine." Soroi murmured, moving his hand to stroke the young girl's cheek. Satsuki's eyes instantly flew open, pupils constricted in sheer terror. She violently flinched away from his touch with a loud cry, and her arms flew to protect her chest and intimate area.

Soroi froze, hand midair. The girl stared at him with her chest heaving, desperately gasping for air. Her eyes fluttered across the room, searching for whatever it was that had haunted her sleep. After a moment passed, Satsuki seemed to recognize him and her arms relaxed. She quickly avoided his eyes and stared into her lap, shame flooding her cheeks.

Soroi felt cold inside as he realized the implications of what just happened. In the few years he had served Satsuki, he had grown to care for the young girl as he would his own daughter. The thought that someone had hurt her in such a cruel way was unthinkable, yet the evidence was clearly laid before him. All strength rushed from his body and his hand dropped limply back to his lap.

"Satsuki. I..." he heard himself stutter, utter dismay incapacitating his ability to speak. Satsuki began to tremble and her breath hitched rapidly. The young girl's hands rose to her face and she began sob.

Tears flooded his eyes at the sight. Soroi felt completely helpless: there was no way to protect her from her mother without placing both their lives at risk. The girl would have to endure her mother's whims. His arm slowly reached out to lay a comforting hand on her shoulder as he murmured her name. Satsuki froze for a moment at the contact before leaning towards him and his warm presence. She sobbed against his chest as he silently embraced her, holding her while stroking her head with his hand.

They remained like that until Satsuki's hiccupping sobs had ceased and her breath returned to normal.

"I can't protect you from her." Soroi said quietly. "I can't stop it from happening, no one can. But I promise you that I will be here for you, and share your pain with you until the day comes that you are strong enough to surpass her and punish her for what she did."

Satsuki listened silently with her face still buried in his shirt. After a few moments passed she stirred and pulled away from his warm embrace. She met his eyes with her lips pressed together in a determined line, and wiped a stray tear away with the heel of her hand.

"Thank you." She said simply, before gently laying back down. Satsuki stared at the ceiling with a steady gaze as Soroi quietly rose from her bedside and returned to his quarters.

From that point after Soroi would often maintain long vigils in the night, anxious to comfort the girl and to chase the bad dreams away.